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Chair: Mr. Saikal ..... (Afghanistan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Organizational matters

1. **The Chair** said that the Committee would proceed to vote on the proposal to seek a legal opinion from the United Nations Legal Counsel, which read "What are the legal bases for the inclusion of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi on the list of the Third Committee of the General Assembly of special mandate holders mandated to present a report to the Assembly at its seventy-third session; and the legal basis for the dialogue of the aforementioned Commission with the Committee in view of paragraph 22 of Human Rights Council resolution 39/14 of 28 September 2018?"

Statements made in explanation of vote before the voting

2. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that although the Charter and the rules of procedure of the General Assembly were clear on the need for respect of the sovereignty of Member States, some States had attempted to encroach on that sovereignty during the 10th meeting of the Committee. Consequently, the African Group wished to underscore three fundamental points. First, every delegation had the right to seek a legal opinion from the Office of Legal Affairs without a vote, as such votes were likely to be politicized and lead to polarization within the Committee. Second, as there had never been a case where a request for a legal opinion had been put to a vote, the African Group was concerned that the decision to proceed with a vote violated the rules of procedure and could set a precedent that would undermine State sovereignty and the credibility of the Committee. Third, the African Group urged the Chair to heed the wisdom of Member States and look to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the rules of procedure for guidance.

3. **Ms. Korac** (United States of America) said that her delegation would vote against the proposal as a request for a legal opinion must be made by an intergovernmental body; it could not be made by an individual Member State.

4. **Mr. Castillo Santana** (Cuba) said that it was his understanding that the decision to submit the question of the delegation of Burundi to the Office of Legal Affairs had already been taken, on 2 October 2018, and that only one delegation had been opposed to that course of action. It was truly regrettable that the principle of good faith, which should underlie the Committee's work, should be obstructed by a single position aimed at blocking the legitimate right of a State to seek clarification on any issue. For that reason, his delegation would vote in favour of the proposal to seek a legal opinion.

5. *A recorded vote was taken on the proposal by Burundi to seek a legal opinion from the United Nations Legal Counsel.*

In favour:

Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Congo, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Against:

United States of America.

Abstaining:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cote D'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Samoa, San Marino, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom, Uruguay.

6. *The proposal to seek a legal opinion from the United Nations Legal Counsel was adopted by 91 votes to one, with 66 abstentions.*

7. **Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation had voted in favour of the proposal because States that championed the rule of law should not be afraid to request a legal opinion.

8. **Mr. Poveda Brito** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his delegation had voted in favour of the proposal on the basis that a Member State had a legitimate right to request a legal opinion from the Office of Legal Affairs. The matter could be handled through consensus, as in the past, in the spirit of good faith that had always guided the Committee.

9. **The Chair** said that the Committee would thus resume its consideration of the pending invitations of special mandate holders as soon as it received the requested legal opinion.

Agenda item 70: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*)

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/73/257, A/73/41, A/73/265, A/73/272, A/73/278, A/73/276, A/73/174, A/73/174/Corr.1) (*continued*)

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (A/73/223) (*continued*)

10. **Mr. Locsin** (Philippines) said that children were the most vulnerable members of society. Because they were guileless, unable to tell friend from foe, and utterly defenceless, the State must step in to ensure their survival and well-being. In fact, children were the most compelling justification for the very existence of States. The Government took its role of protector of children seriously. The constitution of the Philippines defended the rights of children to assistance, proper care and nutrition and protection from all forms of neglect and exploitation. Children had the right to free and compulsory primary education, and, recently, that right had been extended to tertiary education in public institutions.

11. Children in the Philippines were protected from any form of threat, assault or torture, and pending legislation would protect them from corporal punishment. As children did not belong on the battlefield in any capacity, an armed forces circular on child protection in armed conflicts contained strict procedures for responding to violations by State and non-State actors. After Philippine troops retook the city of Marawi, children that had been separated from their families had been reunited with them.

12. The Philippines valued participation and inclusion, and thus children were represented at various levels of governance. In the previous 10 years, the Philippines had passed 30 child-focused laws and had worked to create a nurturing environment that allowed children to enjoy their lives.

13. **Ms. Wadibiya-Anyanwu** (Nigeria) said that the National Child Rights Implementation Committee had been created in order to ensure the full realization of the Child Rights Act, which in turn had been enacted in 2003 to fully incorporate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into national law. In further demonstration of the commitment of the Government to all human rights, a national task force was responsible for providing protection of and support for children against abuse, molestation and victimization in public and private places.

14. The Government was mainstreaming children into national politics through its creation of the Nigerian Children's Parliament, which had been replicated in all 36 states of the Federation as well as the Federal Capital Territory. It had also developed a national priority agenda for a multisectoral approach to ensuring that all social sector programmes were sensitive to the welfare of the most vulnerable children and their families. Other initiatives included the formulation of national policy on child labour, to be followed by the creation of child labour units; the implementation of a national information management system to ensure unified national reporting on programming for orphans and vulnerable children; and the digitization of the national birth registration agency. The Government was also carrying out a series of initiatives to improve school safety and safeguard against attacks, provide education in emergency situations, enhance girl child education and increase their enrolment rates, and end child marriage. The Cyber Crime Act addressed the challenge of cyber manipulation as a tool for violence, bullying, trafficking, sexual exploitation and recruitment to extremist groups.

15. Her delegation called on the international community to ensure the legal protection of children from sexual abuse, exploitation and other evils.

16. **Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan) said that his country had established frameworks to strengthen children's rights, including a 2010 law protecting children from all forms of violence, inhumane treatment, neglect, exploitation and all forms of sexual abuse. In accordance with that law, the Sudan had adopted an integrated legal framework to deal with minors, which included the appointment of a special prosecutor for crimes against them. To strengthen the prohibition on violations of

children's rights, the Government had appointed a public prosecutor for crimes in Darfur that would investigate relevant cases from that region. A 24-hour hotline had been set up to provide immediate assistance to child victims of violence.

17. The Government of the Sudan complied with all international and regional instruments on the rights of migrants and refugees. Trafficking in persons was prohibited by a 2014 law and the Children's Act, and the country had signed bilateral agreements with various neighbouring States to combat it. It had also offered training to police officers and prosecutors on how to deal with matters pertaining to trafficking in persons and had provided safe houses for victims.

18. The Sudan had signed a joint action plan with the United Nations on the protection of children in armed conflict, which had resulted in the removal of the Sudan from the list of parties that recruited and used child soldiers. The Sudan wished to extend thanks to the UNICEF office in Khartoum for providing former child soldiers with shelter and psychological support.

19. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh) said that his Government believed that children's rights could best be protected by guaranteeing education and health care, and it had worked tirelessly to deliver those services, even to remote areas. Since early 2018, the Government had provided over 350 million free textbooks to students at primary and secondary schools and stipends for millions of students were sent directly to their mothers through mobile telephones. Dropout rates had decreased. The country had also sent buses equipped with computers across the country to provide training in information and communication technology. Programmes had been developed for students with disabilities and books in braille had been distributed to the visually impaired.

20. The Government was particularly committed to the welfare of women and girls. In 2017, Bangladesh had updated its Child Marriage Restraint Act and had developed a national plan of action to end child marriage. Those measures had gradually reduced child marriage. Bangladesh had also developed action plans to provide children and adolescents access to information about sexual and reproductive health rights and services.

21. The Government of Bangladesh welcomed the discussion of the grave violations perpetrated by Myanmar authorities against Rohingya children, who formed a significant portion of the 720,000 forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. Existing services such as victim support centres and toll-free helplines were currently being extended to Rohingya women and children in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar.

22. **Mr. Rumongi** (Rwanda) said that recent data from the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict showed an increase in verified cases of the six grave violations. Rwanda commended the achievements of the Special Representative and relevant United Nations agencies in alleviating children's suffering.

23. Rwanda had prioritized children's participation in national policies and programmes. To that end, the Government had established an annual Children's Summit, which provided an opportunity for children to discuss issues affecting their lives and ensure that their concerns were considered in national policies, and children's forums had been established at the village and district levels. The Government was implementing a national strategy for child care that would transform the current child care and protection system into a supportive, family-based system, thereby shifting the emphasis from institutional care. Rwanda was also working to ensure an inclusive, equitable and safe education system.

24. Rwanda had developed decentralized structures to ensure the protection of children, including child protection units at law enforcement agencies. It had also launched projects to raise awareness of child abuse and ensure that offenders were identified and dealt with through the appropriate legal channels.

25. **Ms. Abbey** (Ghana) said that although greater attention paid to the issue of child marriage had yielded a significant decrease in its prevalence around the world over the previous decade, it remained a major concern, particularly on the African continent. The most recent effort by the African Union to address the problem had been the African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage in Africa, held in Kigali in 2018, where 22 countries had signed on to the campaign and committed to accelerating efforts at the national level. One in three girls in the developing world was married by the age of 18, and the factors that drove and underpinned that practice, such as gender inequality, poverty, social exclusion, marginalization and insecurity, should be addressed with legislative measures, safety nets and poverty reduction strategies, especially in rural areas.

26. The President, in his role as a *HeForShe* Champion, had pledged to increase efforts to reduce and end child marriage, and the Ministry of Gender and Social Protection had established a unit dedicated to that purpose. Engagement with all stakeholders was critical

in such initiatives. The Government had also introduced a free senior high school policy, which enabled more girls to enrol who, owing to poverty, might otherwise have been married off and unable to complete their education.

27. The recruitment and abduction of children for armed conflict and their exploitation and abuse was a matter of serious concern. States should do more to challenge those responsible for such violations of international law, and her delegation urged further measures to protect children and civilians in armed conflict situations. All Member States should recommit themselves to the purposes of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and should endorse the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. The United Nations must not fail in its important task of promoting and protecting children.

28. **Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez** (Uruguay) said that Uruguay had long been a regional and global leader in the promotion and protection of children's rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols constituted the normative framework for protecting children and ensuring their well-being, and crucially, recognized that children were human beings with a set of rights instead of passive objects requiring protection. His delegation called for the Convention and its Optional Protocols to be universally ratified and fully implemented. All reservations to those instruments should also be withdrawn.

29. Children were one of the most vulnerable groups in society and must be protected by public policy. In Uruguay, a code on childhood and adolescence had been adopted by Parliament in 2004, which established that all children and adolescents enjoyed human rights and they must be exercised in accordance with their stage of development. A national plan for early childhood, childhood and adolescence for 2016–2020 had also been drafted. Children's rights must be recognized and safeguarded in all State activities, including in legislation and the formulation of public policy. His country had been working hard along those lines, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

30. Child poverty was an insult to the human condition. Uruguay had implemented targeted anti-poverty policies, in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. His country was especially concerned by the sexual exploitation of children, child prostitution and child pornography and condemned in the strongest terms all violence, exploitation and abuse of children. Violence against children could never be justified and must be prevented and eradicated. The situation of children living in areas of armed conflict was also of particular concern, as well as their recruitment by States and armed groups.

31. **Ms. Bellout** (Algeria) said that her Government had increased its education budget tenfold during the previous 15 years, with free education offered to all children living on Algerian territory, regardless of nationality or status, including to children in refugee camps in Tindouf. Significant achievements had been made in improving the efficiency of the Algerian education system and enabling all children to receive primary education.

32. International human rights law and international humanitarian law had placed special emphasis on protecting children's rights. Algeria was a State party to many international instruments and, in accordance with its international obligations as well as Sustainable Development Goal 16.2, it had passed laws criminalizing violence against children. The Government had also recently enacted a child protection law containing provisions on the protection of at-risk children, on child offenders and on child protection within specialized centres.

33. **Mr. Beleffi** (San Marino) said that his country and had been striving to integrate the general principles of the Convention and its optional protocols into its legal framework and in its policies and programmes. San Marino supported the Paris Commitments and had also been among the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

34. The 2030 Agenda emphasized respect for human rights and dignity and required specific measures to support the vulnerable. Accordingly, children and young people must be supported so that they grew up free of all forms of abuse and exploitation. Unfortunately, children in areas of armed conflict were killed, kidnapped, raped, used as human shields and recruited as soldiers. Their schools and hospitals were often destroyed, depriving them of their fundamental rights. In 2018, San Marino had added its name to the list of countries supporting the Safe Schools Declaration, an important tool for protecting educational facilities from military use during conflicts.

35. **Ms. Ershadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her country was committed to promoting and protecting children's rights. Over the past 40 years, Iranians had been subjected to illegal, inhumane and genocidal

unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States, which flouted human rights and were indiscriminately targeting the most vulnerable, including children and those in need of vital medical attention.

36. Armed conflicts around the world were leaving mental and physical scars on children trapped in conflict zones. Yemen was the scene of a humanitarian catastrophe and violations of the human rights of children. Indiscriminate and intentional attacks had resulted in the mass killing and maiming of children, and their suffering had been exacerbated by severe famine and disease as the result of an inhumane blockade. The protection of Yemeni children must be given greater attention by the international community.

37. Children's rights had been incorporated into her country's sixth five-year development plan and its Charter of Citizenship Rights. The national development plan addressed aspects of physical and mental health, such as comprehensive vaccination and combating child labour, while the Charter recognized rights such as access to age-appropriate information and protection from harassment and violence.

38. Iranian girls and boys enjoyed equal access to education and, following intervention at the highest level of Government, all children living in Iran could be registered free of charge in schools, including undocumented refugees. On the subject of health, the gap between rural and urban children had been reduced by 50 per cent in three years.

39. Lastly, she wished to recall the pain suffered by the children who had ended up in cages and who had been forcibly separated from their parents and families because of short-sighted political interests. Her delegation regretted that the United Nations had been unable to properly respond to such a flagrant violation of their human rights.

40. **Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, prior to the current crisis, his country had made great strides towards sustainable development in the fields of education and health care and had curbed communicable diseases through its national immunization campaign. Since the onset of the crisis, however, State institutions had to work to preserve those achievements. In collaboration with friendly Governments and organizations authorized to operate in the country, Syria had managed to provide free education and health care for children and organize vaccination campaigns. With the help of UNICEF and the World Food Programme, children in areas that had been controlled by terrorist organizations were able to move to Government-controlled areas.

41. The Syrian delegation was surprised by the statements of certain delegations regarding their Governments' efforts to ensure respect for the rights of children internationally. The representative of one regional group, for example, had spoken of the need to leave no child behind and of policies to fight poverty. However, such statements were contradicted by the imposition of coercive unilateral measures on a number of countries, including Syria. They were also contradicted by the selectivity and politicization in dealing with human rights issues, the silence in the face of violations committed by influential countries and the aggression against Syria by the illegitimate international coalition.

42. Syria called for an end to all inhumane practices against Syrian and non-Syrian children in refugee camps. It also called for an end to the suffering of Syrian and Arab children living in the occupied Syrian Golan and other occupied Arab territory. It also warned of the suffering and diminished educational opportunities for children that would result from cuts to the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

43. **Ms. Ahmed** (Bahrain) said that her country understood the importance of providing a secure environment for children in order to foster the full development of their capacities and talents. To that end, the Government of Bahrain had taken measures in the areas of health care, education and social and psychological protection for children. It had created a set of professional development workshops for public school and kindergarten teachers. It had also established counselling services for school children.

44. The country's National Childhood Strategy included measures to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse as well as initiatives to ensure respect for their physical and psychological safety. The Ministry of Labour and Social Development had set up a hotline to receive reports of child abuse or endangerment and to provide counselling and referrals to relevant agencies. The hotline also offered real-time consultations and legal advice to families. Bahrain had organized training workshops for children on issues of sexual harassment.

45. In order to spread awareness of the National Childhood Strategy, various media in Bahrain had adopted policies to instil the values and attitudes towards children promoted in the Convention. Bahraini television and radio had developed engaging and balanced programmes on matters related to children's rights. A programme featuring a family counsellor addressed topics such as violence against children, the

principles of child psychology and teaching children about sexual harassment.

46. **Mr. McElwain** (United States of America) said that the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development supported international organizations, non-governmental institutions and others in the private sector in their work to prevent and reduce child, early and forced marriage. Those initiatives included, for instance, an annual educational residential retreat for youth scholars in the Gambia, and a project to address child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation in northern Kenya. Community dialogues were held in order to change norms and promote the value of girls and engage youth on human rights issues.

47. Education could help to fill the gap in economic or employment opportunities lost because of early or forced marriages. From 2011 to 2017, nearly 70 million children benefited from early grade reading instruction funded by the Agency, and 725,000 youth gained new or better employment after participating in Agency-funded workforce development programmes. Some 4.1 million children and youth in crisis or conflict countries who had previously been out of school had received access to education. Almost half of the beneficiaries of such programmes were female.

48. The Department of State was combating child, early and forced marriage by providing emergency assistance funds to victims and potential victims of such practices and was supporting related local organizations in the Middle East among Syrian and other refugees. The United States was committed to efforts to provide a brighter future for girls.

49. **Mr. Tiare** (Burkina Faso) said that his Government had made enormous efforts to meet its international obligations in the context of rapid demographic growth, weak socioeconomic expansion and security challenges. Burkina Faso now had a robust legal and institutional corpus on the promotion and protection of children's rights, following the adoption of laws and decrees in areas such as child labour; the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and violence against women and girls. A national council for childhood had been established to monitor and evaluate the efforts made by Burkina Faso to protect children's rights.

50. His Government had adopted a national economic and social development plan in 2016, which made children's rights a priority and contained key objectives on improving quality of life for women and children through better health, education and social protection.

51. His Government had also undertaken to make 18 the legal age of marriage for both girls and boys. In collaboration with civil society, and with the active involvement of customary and religious leaders, the Government had also established multisectoral platforms and operational plans to foster an environment that protected adolescents who had been victims of or who were at risk of early marriage or female genital mutilation.

52. Despite the progress made, however, numerous challenges remained, including access to clean drinking water, hygiene and sanitation, the vulnerability of children in some regions owing to growing insecurity, and the persistence of harmful cultural practices. Burkina Faso hoped to be able to address those challenges with the support of its technical and financial partners and UNICEF. His Government appreciated the support it had received and would continue to work with the international community to promote and protect children's rights.

53. **Ms Chidiac** (Lebanon) said that adults still failed to understand that every child was special. Governments, societies, institutions and individuals owed it to children to protect them, promote them, help them reach their full potential and give them a voice.

54. Lebanon continued to place children at the heart of its development policies. The recent parliamentary elections would pave the way for new legislative and executive measures that would further cement the country's progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, considerable advances had been made in the past few years. Lebanon remained committed to the provision of free and mandatory education in public schools, health-care services and free vaccinations, social and judicial protection and protection from cybercrime, sexual harassment and violence. In order to ensure that children's voices were heard, the Government had developed a children's parliament project to educate children on parliamentary procedures and develop their leadership skills. The National Commission for Lebanese Women had prepared a study on protecting underage girls from early marriage and had drafted a law to regulate the practice. Children with disabilities were being given considerable attention in order to continue safeguarding their basic rights.

55. The main challenge currently facing Lebanon was the presence of over 1.2 million displaced Syrians, more than 417,000 of whom were aged between 3 and 14 years, which had placed health-care and school infrastructure under extreme pressure. In cooperation with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, Lebanon had set up hundreds of schools

to teach refugee children. Basic health coverage was provided for all children through the national network of primary health centres.

56. **Mr. Tōnē** (Tonga) said that Tonga was firmly committed to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child through national legislation and policies. As a small island developing State, Tonga faced considerable resource and financial constraints, which had led to delays in fulfilling its reporting obligations in a timely manner. However, the country had recently submitted its first report under article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had made significant strides in the promotion and protection of children's rights through genuine and enduring partnerships, including with Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and UNICEF Pacific.

57. Greater online connectivity was providing more opportunities, but it had also given rise to security threats. With the support of its partners, Tonga had aligned its criminal legislation with the Convention on Cybercrime of the Council of Europe, strengthening the country's laws and policies to combat sexual exploitation and violence against children perpetrated through cyberspace and cybertechnologies, including bullying.

58. The Government continued to work to uphold the rights of children in the criminal justice system. In conjunction with its partners, the Government was actively building the system's capacity to handle juvenile cases and was establishing equal access to justice and legal protection for children who were survivors of domestic violence or vulnerable to it.

59. As a low-lying large ocean State, the human rights of everyone in the country, including children, were closely linked to protection of the marine and land environment. That nexus, in the light of climate change and rising sea levels, was a pressing concern that threatened the country's very existence. Tonga therefore welcomed the decision of the International Law Commission to include the topic "Sea-level rise in relation to international law" in its long-term programme of work.

60. **Ms. Abdalla** (United Arab Emirates) said that in 2016, her country had enacted a law to protect children from neglect, exploitation, physical and psychological violence and online abuse. In November 2018, the United Arab Emirates would host a global forum on protecting children from online abuse. The forum would be attended by prominent religious leaders who would aim to formulate common principles on how to keep young people safe from exploitation over the Internet. The event would coincide with World Children's Day and reinforce the importance of arriving at shared views and approaches. The United Arab Emirates had joined the Virtual Global Taskforce, an international working group composed of police forces and executive agencies from various countries which aimed to combat cybercrime against children. The country had also ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

61. In 2013, the United Arab Emirates had launched the Children's International Film Festival, whose aim was to screen international films and modern media content of particular interest to young viewers, to teach children about other cultures and reinforce the value of peaceful coexistence. In an effort to foster children's participation in electoral processes and provide them with a forum in which to share their views, the United Arab Emirates hosted the permanent headquarters of the Arab Children's Parliament. The Government had launched a national strategy for the 2017–2021 period to bolster the rights of children with disabilities.

62. **Ms. Niculae** (Romania) said that Romania had become one of the two European pathfinder countries in the Global Partnership to end Violence against Children in 2016, committing to identify and operationalize initiatives to end violence against children, deliver services to prevent and respond to violence, and support reforms in the country and beyond. Several awareness-raising campaigns had been run by the Government in conjunction with UNICEF Romania and non-governmental organizations to increase recognition of various forms of violence and more cases of violence against children were being reported as a result, thus giving authorities the opportunity to intervene. In January 2018, the Government had established a national ombudsman for children.

63. The Ministry of National Education was implementing national strategies on the promotion and protection of children's rights, the creation of a society without barriers for persons with disabilities, and child and adolescent mental health. It had also issued key documents on preventing and countering violence and juvenile delinquency and ensuring school safety. In conjunction with Save the Children Romania, the Ministry of National Education had published a guide on safe Internet use for pupils and had run anti-hate and anti-bullying campaigns. A national plan to prevent bullying was also under consideration. Children with special educational needs could be enrolled in both mainstream education and special schools and legislative and concrete measures had been taken to ensure their access to school and employment.

64. Combating and preventing school dropouts was another priority. The Government provided financial support for pupils unable to attend school in their home towns and second-chance programmes supported those who had not yet completed their compulsory education.

65. At the policy level, a new set of strategies had been developed for 2014–2020 to combat child poverty and ensure well-being, targeting areas such as health, the rights of persons with disabilities and Roma inclusion. Romania was also firmly committed to continuing the process of de-institutionalizing children in residential care by developing family-based alternatives and had made significant progress over the years. The National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption was currently implementing a national project to provide each child in the protection system with an environment as close as possible to that offered by a family.

66. **Ms. Mohammed** (Ethiopia) said that one of her Government's greatest successes had been the integration of the promotion and protection of children's rights into its economic and social policy. Significant reforms had been undertaken to bring national laws into line with international instruments and a five-year action plan for children had been developed. Ethiopia was informing the public about children's rights and was also educating the children themselves; school clubs had made important contributions in tackling early marriage as well as harmful traditional practices. By 2016, the prevalence of female genital mutilation had been reduced to 23 per cent and that of child marriage to 8 per cent.

67. In collaboration with UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Ethiopia had developed a standard operating procedure for tackling trafficking in children, which provided a framework for a coordinated and standardized response that included registration, family tracing, reunification and the reintegration of trafficked children.

68. The employment of children under the age of 14 was prohibited and bullying was being addressed through a code of conduct on the prevention of school-related gender-based violence, which had been developed in 2016 with technical and financial assistance from UNICEF. Despite the progress made by Ethiopia in various domains, however, much remained to be done in light of the enormity of the challenges the country faced.

69. **Ms. Banasen** (Cameroon) said that, despite the progress made in implementing the Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children", their situation remained worrying in many parts of the world, but particularly in Africa. His Government was extremely concerned by the activities of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, which used abduction as a modus operandi and forced children to participate in the hostilities. The Government had taken steps to halt the practice, including by promoting children's education and raising awareness among imams of the need to protect children from being used in armed conflicts.

70. Campaigns to raise awareness of children's rights in the family context had produced good results. Cameroon had also emphasized training staff to assist the victims of domestic violence and their families and had established mechanisms to raise awareness of and respond to cases of violence against children, especially in the Far North Region. The level of physical abuse in schools had decreased in real terms.

71. Education was central to realizing the fundamental rights of children and was provided free of charge in both rural and urban areas. Schooling was also provided for girls in the Far North Region, in pygmy camps and for the many refugees hosted by his country. The advent of a world fit for children would depend on taking a comprehensive approach to tackling poverty in all its forms, and the international community must support efforts made by States. Only such active solidarity could give the world "the future we want".

72. **Ms. Vives Balmaña** (Andorra) said that Andorra made annual contributions to the Trust Fund for Children and Armed Conflict. In addition, it had endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles) and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (Vancouver Principles) and the Safe Schools Declaration. The thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be marked by a renewed commitment to protect and promote children's rights.

73. Her Government had launched a plan of action to prevent bullying and give students tools for resolving conflict through dialogue. Teachers must be trained in preventing bullying, supporting the victims and correcting the bullies. To encourage participation from young people, a short film competition had been launched, and campaigns were planned to raise awareness of the problem.

74. During her visit to Andorra in June 2018, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children had called for investment in childhood. Andorra was applying that approach, particularly with regard to education and the social and family environment. Her country also collaborated with

UNICEF to promote children's rights nationally and to contribute to their well-being in other countries. The Government was finalizing a draft law on children and adolescents' rights, which covered both rights and responsibilities as well as measures for coordinating and planning policies on childhood. A national council would be established through which children and adolescents could participate and be represented, and a national registry would be set up to monitor and follow up on all cases of child abuse. The Government had also recently launched a campaign to combat sexual abuse in sport. Sometimes, the first step in addressing a problem was to heighten its visibility within society.

75. **Ms. Taradai** (Ukraine) said that the Government had recently adopted the national action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through 2021. The program updated the working methods of State authorities and local self-government bodies at all levels in order to secure the interests of children. The government had also taken legislative measures to combat bullying and establish responsibility for it. Furthermore, steps were being taken to improve legislation and ensure that children and other persons with special educational needs had access to free educational, psychological, pedagogical and correctional development in State and municipal educational institutions. The Government had introduced special programmes to enable children in the temporarily occupied territories of Crimea and Donbass to receive higher education in mainland Ukraine.

76. With regard to the more than 220,000 children in Donetsk and Luhansk regions living inside the 30-kilometer-wide buffer zone affected by Russian aggression, the Government strongly condemned the practice of shelling of schools by Russian-controlled illegal armed groups, which had been described in a recent report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Ukraine. In addition to such ceasefire violations, children along the contact line were heavily affected by landmines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance, which were the leading cause of child casualties.

77. The practical assistance provided by UNICEF in training psychologists working with children, students, teachers and other education personnel to address the problem of posttraumatic stress disorder was highly valued, as were mine-risk education campaigns providing life-saving information in conflict-affected areas.

78. Ukraine was committed to promoting and protecting the rights of children, creating favourable conditions for their lives and development, ensuring equal opportunities for them and protecting them from violence. It would remain a reliable partner and support the efforts of the international community to achieve those aims.

79. **Mr. Melad** (Libya) said that his country was fully committed to implementing all international human rights instruments to which it was a party, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto. Libya had adopted laws to safeguard the rights of all male and female children in the country, including the rights to free education, shelter, clean drinking water, food and freedom from all forms of violence. Libyan law also ensured that children with disabilities and children living in difficult circumstances as a result of the crisis affecting the country enjoyed the same rights as all other children.

80. Law No. 10 of 1984 regulating marriage and divorce prohibited early marriage and provided that both men and women must be at least 20 years old in order to marry. Libya had raised the age of majority from 16 to 18 years of age and had amended the law on juvenile justice to bring it into line with relevant international instruments. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education was working closely with other ministries and with the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the International Organization for Migration to assess the country's educational needs and develop and implement a strategy for improving Libya's education system. Libya was also seeking to promote positive, non-violent forms of discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment and was taking steps to foster a culture of peace and non-violence among children with a view to combating bullying in schools.

81. The promotion and protection of the rights of children could not be achieved in the absence of peace and security. Children and adolescents were disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment and at particular risk of being recruited by groups espousing extremist ideologies. It was therefore crucial to resolve armed conflicts, combat terrorist and extremist groups, promote a culture of non-violence, and uphold international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The international community must redouble its efforts to ensure that all children grew and prospered in safe and nurturing environments. Mechanisms must also be developed to facilitate the repatriation of minors from abroad, including children who had been forcibly recruited by terrorist and extremist groups, and promote their reintegration into their societies.

82. **Ms. Cordova Soria** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that, while there had been setbacks in the collective path towards building more just societies, such as the migration crisis and the weakening of multilateralism, there had also been some notable advances, as in the case of child protection.

83. In Bolivia, new development and poverty reduction programmes had been implemented to promote greater economic and social equality, which placed a special emphasis on children and families. In 2014, a new code on childhood and adolescence had been adopted, which was based on the international instruments ratified by the Bolivian State and on an analysis of the challenges faced by children and adolescents in the context of Bolivian culture and ancestral values. A law on youth had also been in force since 2013, which recognized the full and active participation of young people through their organizations and gave priority to programmes that enabled young people to gain access to their rights. A programme had also been implemented since 2009 that provided technical training to young people with few economic resources and helped them find work.

84. The infant mortality rate had dropped considerably and Bolivia was working to reduce it further. The Government had implemented an economic incentive called Bono Juana Azurduy, which required pregnant women to attend four prenatal appointments, give birth in a hospital and attend a postpartum check-up, and attend regular appointments to monitor the child's growth and development until their second birthday. A far higher number of children were now being born in hospital and malnutrition among under-fives in Bolivia had fallen. Bono Juancito Pinto, a similar programme, aimed to increase school enrolment and decrease the dropout rate, thus reducing the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

85. **Mr. Gimolieca** (Angola) said that issues concerning children had always been a priority of the Government, which had worked hard to promote their rights domestically in accordance with national commitments, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as other regional and international agreements. Recently the Government had approved a national development plan for 2018–2022 that included concrete programmes to prevent child institutionalization, promote employment and income generation, support childcare institutions, and promote the health and education sectors. A new law on the integral development of the child and the sound social protection that required had also been passed.

86. Despite the complexities of the situation of child poverty, which posed an obstacle to the protection of children's rights, the Government noted improved access to birth registration, maternal and child health programmes, education and other areas, as well as a considerable reduction in child mortality rates. The Government also was determined to prohibit the harmful practices of early and forced marriage, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Convention, and was working to eliminate from law the few remaining exceptions under which marriage could take place before the age of 18.

87. With regard to the human rights challenge of violence against children, the Government condemned traditional practices that harmed human dignity, and had recently adopted national policies and laws to prohibit all types of violence and support child victims and vulnerable segments of society. A national strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities had also been implemented to address stigma and discrimination against them.

88. **Mr. Gumende** (Mozambique) said that gender issues, the rights of children and persons with disabilities, and the protection of older persons were integrated in national development plans. Children were recognized as people at an early stage of development, and they were the pillars of the country's sustainable development as they grew into adults. The Constitution established the legal framework to ensure the promotion and protection of children's rights in accordance with the Convention, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other international treaties signed by Mozambique. Several existing domestic laws also codified the protection of children in various aspects. Children living in poverty, in particular, were a group defined by such laws as a priority for Government intervention.

89. Many stakeholders were involved in the promotion and protection of children's rights, including public and private institutions, civil society organizations and United Nations agencies, and children even had their own parliament where they exercised their legislative rights and discussed issues of concern in an open and frank manner. However, the Government was also conscious of the challenges ahead, such as poverty, limited access to education, health services, water and sanitation for all children, which prevented the full enjoyment of their rights. Those challenges played a prominent role in Government development plans.

90. **Mr. Sipaco Ribala** (Equatorial Guinea) said that his country remained concerned by the remaining challenges and by the violations of children's rights,

especially during armed conflict. Equatorial Guinea had improved its child protection system by modernizing its legislative bases and incorporating policies on gender equality and child protection. To ensure justice for minors, the Government had adopted Decree 50/2017, which extended family and guardianship courts to all provincial capitals. To strengthen institutional capacity on the basis of best practice, the Government had participated in a high-level meeting on ending child marriage and a workshop on measuring disability in children.

91. The number of children attending preschool and primary school in Equatorial Guinea had risen steadily and gender parity had been achieved. A committee had been established to support the protection and promotion of children's rights, through which an educational centre for the most vulnerable children had been set up.

92. Equatorial Guinea would continue to work closely with UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, development partners and civil society organizations to promote and protect children's rights. Member States should ensure child protection capacity and continue to provide opportunities to advocate for better child protection, including in situations of armed conflict, and to promote the participation of and consultation with children and adolescents, especially girls, through education, the development of leadership skills and the provision of safe spaces and support networks, all of which enabled them to become agents of change in their communities.

93. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that the family was the natural and fundamental core unit to ensure the growth, development and well-being of children and adolescents. Parents and guardians, in conjunction with the State, bore the primary responsibility for educating, training and guiding children and adolescents in exercising their rights in accordance with their stage of development. For that reason, the Government focused on developing programmes that benefited Nicaraguan families.

94. His Government's commitment to upholding children's rights was reflected in statistics such as the considerable reduction in the under-five mortality rate and the decrease in extreme poverty. In addition, the Ministry of Education had made huge efforts to narrow the digital divide and one in three children under 18 years of age was now connected to the Internet.

95. With the support of UNICEF, the Ministry of Family, Adolescence and Childhood had implemented a strategy from 2007 to 2017 to return children living in protection centres to their families. By 2017, the number of such centres had been reduced from 92 to 25, through dialogue with the religious groups and other organizations that were running the centres.

96. **Ms. Ferry** (Monaco) said that the Principality was a sponsor of Security Council resolutions concerning the plight of children in situations of armed conflict, had participated in awareness-raising and reintegration initiatives, and had endorsed a declaration on the security of schools, which were often used for war-related purposes in times of conflict, thereby endangering students.

97. Education was a fundamental right and was vital to the economic, social and cultural development of all societies. In 2017 a non-governmental organization, with the financial support of the Government, had distributed birth certificates to children who did not have them, with the aim of ensuring that they could successfully register at school, participate in official examinations and become active citizens.

98. Demonstrating its engagement in the area of promotion and protection of the rights of the child, Monaco had convened a high-level symposium on the topic of violence against children in the context of the family or the school, which had been attended by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. Over the previous decade, the Government had also organized workshops and conferences for students to learn about the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. The international community should make every effort to create a world fit for children, who were agents of change and the leaders of tomorrow.

99. **Ms. Bah-Chang** (Sierra Leone) said that no child should be denied their fundamental rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocols thereto and all relevant international human rights instruments. As part of its national response, the Government had restructured or reorganized several institutions in order to more effectively monitor and coordinate children's rights issues. There was a national committee on gender-based violence, a national referral protocol for child victims of sexual and gender-based violence, and projects to build homes for victims of domestic violence in the northern and western parts of the country. A new policy on child welfare and alternative care and a strategy on teenage pregnancy and child marriage would be launched in the current month.

100. Legislative protection existed in the form of the Child Rights Act, and the Government was committed to implementing several other measures in the future. Those included increasing the budget for

implementation of relevant laws, increasing the capacity to investigate and prosecute reported cases, improving protection, rehabilitation and reintegration for victims of sexual abuse, launching a national programme for adolescents on sexual and reproductive health, improving opportunities for pregnant girls and teenage mothers to receive education, harmonizing and standardizing laws to combat child marriage, and reviewing and enforcing laws on adoption, child trafficking, child labour and juvenile justice.

101. A policy of free, quality education had been introduced in order to reduce marginalization and increase access by every child, from primary through secondary school level, to education at all Government and Government-assisted schools. In the context of efforts to achieve Goal 4, educational facilities should be child-friendly, sensitive to gender and disability, and provide a safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environment. Despite challenges and constraints in building capacity and implementing existing laws and policies, much progress had indeed been made. Every child deserved a fair chance in life, and every country should promote the welfare of its children.

102. **Mr. Sisa** (Botswana) said that the Government and United Nations agencies had partnered to combat all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage. One example of the fruit of that collaboration was a joint gender programme on gender-based violence for the period 2018–2020.

103. On the domestic front, the Parliament had passed a motion in December 2017 to establish a registry of sexual offenders that would be used to prevent such persons from working in institutions that served children. The age of sexual consent had also been raised from 16 to 18 years in the interest of promoting and protecting the rights of the child. It was expected that that legislative change would be effective in combating defilement and child abuse, abduction, indecent assault and kidnapping of children.

104. Through a partnership with UNICEF, the Chief Executive Officer Council for Child Rights had been established in 2017 with the aim of strengthening the role of the private sector in protecting and advocating children's rights, and especially preventing the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. His delegation expressed gratitude for the assistance provided by UNICEF.

105. Lastly, in 2017 Botswana had submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child its second, third and fourth periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention.

106. **Ms. Tshering** (Bhutan) said that the Government was committed to investing resources in programmes and projects that had a positive impact on the lives of children, youth, women and the vulnerable and disadvantaged. More than half of the population of Bhutan was under the age of 25 and the Government had prioritized the welfare of children and youth in national planning and budgeting. The national development strategy had been informed by the child multidimensional poverty index, which had been developed by Bhutan and was the first of its kind in the world. The approach adopted would be useful in addressing Goal 10 and was intended to end the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

107. The national plan of action for child protection was integrated in the current five-year plan and would empower child and enhance their participation in all parts of society. Child focal points had been appointed in all Government agencies and non-governmental organizations in order to ensure the mainstreaming of children's rights into sector policies and plans. The Bhutan Children's Parliament had also been established in 2015 to fully engage children in the electoral process and encourage their participation in democracy and policy decisions. UNICEF had been a valued partner in such endeavours, and children would remain at the centre of his country's efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.

108. **Mr. Guilavogui** (Guinea) said that several measures had been implemented for the promotion of the rights and welfare of the child. Ten aspirations elaborated by African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in the context of Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children had been taken into consideration in local development plans. An initiative by the First Ladies of the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States would employ a strategic framework to reinforce national systems for protection of children in several key areas. Such initiatives had been integrated in community programming and annual investment plans, and their implementation was in line with the National Economic and Social Development Plan 2016–2020.

109. With regard to judicial reform, the Government had amended laws concerning children so as to clarify texts protecting human rights and reduce the ambiguities that often led to discrimination against or negligence of children. The Government also intended to introduce certification of judges for family affairs in order to

better protect children who were in conflict or who had come into contact with the law. Partnerships with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme had enabled the deployment of 120 social assistants to help with children orphaned by Ebola, migrant children, cases of extreme violence or rape, and girls subjected to child marriage.

110. The President and the National Assembly had also organized or engaged in awareness-raising campaigns to advocate for the rights of the child, and the Government had recently signed a memorandum with UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration with a focus on the management of return of migrants and the social dimensions of such action.

111. **Ms. Al Abri** (Oman) said that her country placed great importance on children, as it believed that children were a vital component of society. Its special interest in children was reflected in the enactment in Oman of the Children's Law in 2014, which guaranteed children the right to life and development and freedom from discrimination on the basis of colour, gender, ethnicity, language, religion or social status. It also granted them freedom of expression.

112. The Government worked to provide all the elements of a decent life for children, including free, high-quality preventive and therapeutic health care, including free vaccines. The Government also guaranteed the right to free education with a view to developing children's skills and their intellectual and physical capabilities, so that they could grow into responsible adults capable of contributing to their societies. The Government had paid special attention to children with disabilities, striving to provide them with all means of a normal life without setting them apart from other children and encouraging self-reliance in their day-to-day activities. To that end, Oman had adopted a law on the care and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and had established several educational and training institutes for persons with disabilities.

113. **Ms. Mehdiyeva** (Azerbaijan) said that in order to bring national legislation into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government had introduced a series of new bills or amendments concerning preschool education, children deprived of parental care, allowances for women with more than five children, maternal and child health and inclusive education for persons with disabilities. In Azerbaijan, children with special needs, refugees, and internally displaced persons were entitled to free education at any State school or university as well as free medical care. The State provided much support to rehabilitate and reintegrate children leaving State-run institutions who had no place of residence, including housing and social allowances, and their situations were regularly monitored by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population had been facilitating the rehabilitation of children with disabilities over the previous five years, and it was clear that accurate and up-to-date data was a prerequisite to the success of monitoring and the implementation of provisions to guarantee respect for the rights of children.

114. The State Statistical Committee annually published a bulletin on the children of the country, while the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, in cooperation with UNICEF, had established an online database containing children's educational and health information as well as reports on any child abuse. Such data was used by other State agencies. Azerbaijan was fully committed to promoting the rights of children and making sure that no child was left behind.

115. **Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation felt it must reply to the statements made by the delegations of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United States of America regarding support provided to Syrian refugee children. Such assistance, if it existed at all, did not erase the fact that the Governments of those three countries were directly responsible for the suffering of Syrian children as well as for their lack of security and stability and the loss of their loved ones. Those Governments had fuelled the crisis in Syria, worked to prolong it and had hindered efforts to arrive at a political solution. They had supported terrorism, had sent terrorist fighters to the country, and had attacked Syria directly. The illegitimate international coalition and their client militias had committed crimes against innocent civilians, including women and children. Were it not for the destruction wrought by those Governments, there would not be such suffering among Syrians, there would be no need for the above-mentioned support and such interventions would not be heard at United Nations forums.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.